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mouths they are able to keep up with the vigorous work of the main stream.

In these comments on 'the two papers I do not bring forward again the statement regarding overlapping spurs which Professor Davis brings out in his paper. From what Bonney and Garwood say it seems evident that neither of them appreciates the full significance of this evidence in favor of glacial erosion.

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## THE HUICHOL INDIANS OF MEXICO.

BY

CARL LUMHOLTZ.

There are living to-day in Mexico about fifty different tribes of Indians, each speaking its own language. Besides, over a hundred and fifty dialects are spoken, so that in all there are in use in that Republic as many as two hundred idioms, none of which is understood by those who speak the others. This diversity of language is partly due to the taciturnity and exclusiveness of the Indians.

In this conglomeration of tribes four were found, at the time of the Conquest, to be far superior to the others, and in possession of a remarkably high culture. These were the Aztecs, the Mayas, the Mixtecs, and the Zapotecs. When the Spaniards invaded Mexico they found these tribes practicing the art of picture writing in their peculiar books, as well as on their stone monuments. Their wonderful architecture and sculptures, the high development of their governmental and religious systems, the barbaric splendour and wealth in which these nations lived, not only baffled the invaders, but the better they become known to the civilized world of the present age the more they excite wonder and admiration. In many sciences, especially in botany and astronomy, these so-called barbarians were in advance even of the Europe of that time. Yet at the very doors of these highly-advanced races there dwelt tribes, such as the Huichol Indians, whose limited intellectual power forced them to remain mentally and socially in an absolutely primitive condition. Strange as this may seem, the fact in itself is by no means unique. Similar instances of wide diversities of culture

existing side by side may even to-day be observed in all the South American republics and in several European countries. It would be as unjust to judge a Filipino from some low-grade Negrito tribes of those islands as it would be to take for a representative American a Moqui Indian dancing with a rattlesnake in his mouth.

The Huichols, although related to the Aztecs, belong to those tribes that remained undeveloped while the Aztec Empire rose and flourished. Montezuma's reign came to a terrible end nearly four hundred years ago; while the humble Huichols have maintained themselves to the present day in their inaccessible mountain fastnesses. True, they, too, were conquered by the Spaniards in the course of the last century; but the impression the victors made on them was so superficial that to-day the tribe practically dwells in the same state of barbarism in which it resided prior to the time when Cortes first set foot on American soil.

These people occupy a small portion of Central Mexico towards the Pacific slope, and number about four thousand souls. They are called by the Mexicans "los Huicholes"—a corruption of the tribal name of "Virárika," which signifies "doctors" or "healers"—a name they fully deserve, as about every third man of them practices that profession. The region belonging to them is, I should judge, some forty miles long by twenty to twenty-five miles wide, and covers the southern spur of the great Sierra Madre range. Of their country the Jesuit Father Ortega says:

It is so wild and frightful to behold that its ruggedness, more than the arrows of its inhabitants, took away the courage of the conquerors; because, not only did the ridges and valleys appear inaccessible, but the extended range of towering mountain peaks confused even the eye.

Franciscan missionaries followed the conquering soldiers, and built four churches. Nominally, the tribe became converted to Christianity; but to-day the churches are in ruins, while the old beliefs, customs, and ceremonies retain an unshaken hold on the minds of the people.

On a morning oppressively hot, in the beginning of June, 1895, I found myself on the way to that country, accompanied by four Mexicans and one Cora Indian. We were on the slope of the mountains that form the western barrier of the country, which has the reputation of being accessible only at four points. We had still several days' climbing before us, and were just packing our mules, when the father of one of my Mexicans came running up to us with a message that seemed quite alarming. News had reached the valley we had left on the day before that the Huichols were up in arms

against that white man—meaning myself—and determined to prevent his entering their villages. The messenger impressed upon my men the necessity of turning back, and implored them not to run any risk by accompanying me. The men immediately stopped packing, and proposed to go back at once. They declared that the Huichols were bad; that they were assassins, and would kill us all.

By dint of much persuasion and some threats I managed to keep my company together, and four days later we arrived at the pueblo of San Andres, where we found a great many Indians gathered on the occasion of a rain-making feast.

I had sent a man ahead to advise the people that I was coming; that I meant no harm to them, and that their neighbours, the Cora Indians, had received me well. Nevertheless, a few were so put out at the unusual appearance of my expedition that they threw down their sombreros and fled into the forest. But the main part of the population received me in a stolid silence, accepting my baneful presence as something they were powerless to avert.

Fortunately, my arrival did not prevent the feast from coming off, as the Indians never allow anything to interfere with the proceedings of their ceremonies. A great event, the sacrifice of an ox, was to take place next morning, and the night preceding had to be devoted to singing, which began shortly after sunset. One man, a singing shaman, was the leader; and he related in song the mythical events of ancient times and the heroic deeds performed by the gods. Each stanza, as he sang it, was repeated by the multitude in front of him. I was astonished at the fertility of the Huichols in what we should call "legendary lore," but what to them is gospel truth and history. There are no written records kept of these traditions. They live on the lips of the people, as national heirlooms, passing from one generation to the next, as originally did the sagas and folk-songs of the ancient Northmen. If he had the physical endurance, a strong shaman could keep on singing new verses night after night for at least a fortnight. I also noted with admiration the quality of their voices. I have never, in any native tribe, heard such good singing.

The purpose of the song was to induce the gods to let the rain come down. The fervour of their efforts was not at all abated by the fact that torrents of rain were already falling before they started their ceremonies; their object now being to prevent the rain from stopping. My wishes were just as fervent in the opposite direction, as the rickety shed that had been assigned to me as my quarters was by no means waterproof. I became, however, reconciled to my fate

by the really beautiful singing of the leader. The steady downpour of the rain, punctuated by fitful flashes of lightning, formed a weird and fantastic accompaniment to the sympathetic singing that came to me through the pitchy darkness of the night, like a voice from fairyland. It was different from anything I had ever experienced among Mexican Indians, or elsewhere, and it seemed as novel as it was enchanting. From that day on I lived with the tribe for about a year.

Knowing that they hated all Mexicans, I discharged and sent back to their own country the men I had brought along with me. I was, therefore, now alone, "a stranger in a strange land"; and there being no hotel accommodations, I became a boarder in a Huichol family—the first and only one they have ever accepted. The conversation at meals was at first limited, as my host's knowledge of Spanish was confined to about a dozen words, and I had not yet learned any of the Huichol language.

While the people remained distrustful and disobliging, I was biding my time. I went to the many feasts that were being held in the temples, and by and by I learned a few stanzas of their songs; and as soon as they heard me sing these to them the situation became changed. They began to feel confidence in me, and to think that I might become of benefit to them. They considered it as something meritorious on my part that I could sing their songs; and the mere ability to mention the names of their gods in this way served me as a protection against any designs they may have had against me. I have even had occasion to utilize this knowledge among other tribes, who, while they did not understand the words, comprehended that the melody was of their own race, not a white man's, and any utterance of it struck a responsive chord in their hearts.

From that time on I was treated with something like friendly consideration, and was taken to all their sacred places, caves, etc. At my request they showed me everything, and, though sometimes reluctantly, would sell me anything I wanted for my collections. But to get correct explanations from these people regarding anything connected with their religion is the hardest part of an ethnologist's task—far more difficult than the collecting and buying of things. First of all, I had to find the proper man to interview, because the mass of the people are ignorant in comparison with the well-informed shamans. These (combining, as in ancient times, the office of priest with that of doctor) are, so to speak, the scientists of the tribe. The next difficulty to overcome was to get

them to answer my questions truthfully. They naturally suspect that some harm may come to them from divulging their secrets to a stranger, as such indiscretion may upset their relation to the gods. Therefore, often they only pretend to give information, while in reality they give you falsehoods and evasions. When, after three or four weeks' searching, I had managed to find the proper man, he generally turned out to be a sympathetic, kind-hearted individual, full of enthusiasm for his faith. But now a new difficulty presented itself in the fact that the brains of these people are so unused to any mental exertion that answering questions soon proved too much for them. It has happened that not only the shaman himself, but the several Indians I had to assist me in interpreting, would drop off to sleep. I had to let them go, because they were exhausted, tired out. After that it would require weeks or months before they would consent to submit to a similar ordeal.

Dealing with these people, therefore, requires an endless patience. But when one succeeds he feels amply repaid for his efforts. There is nothing quite so gratifying as to rescue from oblivion the old myths and traditions that have never been told to a white man before. The glimpse revealed to you of the first faltering steps of the human mind, of the first dawn of history, makes you forget all the hardships and privations you have to submit to in order to obtain it. As the tribe had never been studied before, and as it is not yet contaminated by civilization, I had cause to believe that my labours among them would become of considerable scientific value.

The Huichols are of medium height, well built, of a light chocolate-brown colour, and very healthy. It is rather interesting to note that their babies, before they learn to walk, crawl on all-fours, not on their knees and hands, as do white children. Fond as I am of the Mexican Indians, I am bound to state that they have two failings, which, however, they share with many civilized persons. They have a great inclination to appropriate little things that strike their fancy, although they have never stolen anything from me; and then they do not tell the truth unless it suits them. Highly impressionable and exceedingly emotional, they are easily moved to tears or laughter. They are not warlike, and, if it is necessary to kill an enemy, they prefer to assassinate him.

Their daily life passes much in the same rounds as that of other Indians. The women spend most of their time grinding corn on the metate, and the men make arrows and bows, which are still the only weapons they use in the chase. They also make a weak native

brandy from the root of the maguey, and their distillery is of considerable interest.

The people live in houses generally circular, and at their ranchos there is always to be found a god-house for the worship of the local patron deity. The temples, of which there are about twenty, are built on the same plan as the houses, only much larger. In the centre of the temple floor there is always a place for the fire, which is kept up all night during the dances; but there are no idols here. These are kept in sacred caves in the mountains. Adjoining the temples there are always a number of god-houses, the inside of which presents a striking appearance, on account of the numerous ceremonial objects deposited to please the gods.

The agriculture of the Huichols is of the most primitive type, and consists in simply cutting down and burning the brushwood and then planting corn by digging holes in the ground with a stick, dropping some grains into each hole and closing the earth up again with the point of the foot. As there is little, if any, level land in their mountainous country, the people are obliged to plant on the slope of the hills, where most of the falling rain runs off without penetrating the soil. Therefore, almost incessant rain is needed in summer to make the crops grow. If it stops raining, even for only three or four days, the plants begin to be scorched by the heat of the sun.

As the Indian is thoroughly materialistic, and directs his entire thought towards procuring sufficient food, it will be understood how rain has become the main object of his prayers and the pivot on which his entire religion revolves. His fundamental belief is that the gods are all around him along the horizon, listening to what he says and watching what he is doing. They are angry with man, and grudge him everything; therefore, they also keep the clouds to themselves. But the shamans know how to propitiate them—to put them, so to speak, in good humour by singing of their great deeds in ancient times. The song pleases the gods, and then they let go the clouds. Thus the shamans, and indirectly the people themselves, are able to make it rain.

In addition to the singing it is imperative to make sacrifices of oxen, corn, and whatever else they may have; to hunt deer and to kill turkeys. The Huichol is devoutly religious, and his entire life is one endless devotion to his gods. From his birth to his death his actions are governed by the belief in his native deities, all his thoughts being ever directed toward pleasing them. On

important occasions he takes the advice of the shaman, who throughout his life stands by him in all his troubles, mental and physical.

Many feasts are held during the year—some to prevail upon the gods to bestow upon the people bountiful crops and similar benefits, others to thank them at harvest-time.

Of the greatest importance in the life of the Huichol is the cult of a small cactus, called by them *Hikuli*. This plant has become known to science only in late years, and is of considerable interest. When eaten it creates colour visions; more than that, it takes away all feeling of hunger, thirst, or fatigue, however intense these sensations may have been. Although it has a most exhilarating effect, the condition produced is altogether unlike that following the use of alcohol. The equilibrium of the body is kept better than normal, and a man is enabled to walk steadily and fearlessly along a precipice which otherwise would make him dizzy.

To obtain this plant the Huichols have to send each year deputations to the high central plateau of Mexico, the home of this cactus. The *Hikuli*-seekers have their faces painted with the colour of fire, and are equipped with plenty of plumes and tobacco-gourds. Something like six weeks are required for this pilgrimage. Considering the difficulties that must have beset these journeys in ancient times, when the lands of hostile tribes had to be crossed and recrossed, they are an eloquent testimony to the strength and fortitude which religious conviction will impart even to a barbarian soul. Not less than four months are spent in preparations for the feast celebrating the arrival of the fresh *Hikuli*. These preparations consist principally of prayers for success in hunting deer, as without the deer being killed the feast cannot come off. So prominent a part does the deer play in the religion of the Huichols that if by any chance this animal should become extinct the religion of the people would have to become modified.

The gods are, in the main, personifications of natural phenomena, as the sun, fire, water, and air. They are called Fathers, Grandfathers, Great-Grandfathers, and Elder Brothers, while the goddesses are Mothers. The main goddess, the mother of all the gods and of vegetation, is called Mother Nakawé, and resides in the nether world. There are a great many Mothers, chief among them those of corn, water, springs, and rain.

The Huichols also look upon their gods as the founders and ancestors of the tribe, the originators of the customs of the people, and the inaugurators of their religious ceremonies. Further, they believe that the gods even taught the tribe how to worship



them, in their own peculiar way. The Huichols, like the Aztecs, believe that they themselves made the Sun.

In the beginning, the Huichols will tell you, there was only the light of the moon in the world, and the people were much inconvenienced. The principal men came together to consult what should be done to give the world a better light. They asked the moon to lend them her only son, a limp and one-eyed boy. She at first objected, but at last consented. They gave the boy a full ceremonial dress, with sandals, plumes and tobacco-gourds, and his bow and arrows, and they painted his face. They then threw him into an oven, where he was consumed; but he revived, ran under the earth, and five days later arose as the Sun.

When the Sun radiated his light and heat over the world, all the nocturnal animals—the jaguars, the mountain lions, the wolves, the coyotes, the grey foxes, and the serpents—became very angry and shot arrows at him. His heat was great, and his glaring rays blinded the nocturnal animals; and with eyes closed they retired into caves, water-pools, and trees. Still, if it had not been for the grey squirrel and the gigantic woodpecker, the Sun would not have been able to complete his first journey across the sky. These two were the only ones who defended him; they would rather die than allow the Sun to be shot, and in the west they placed *tesvino* (a kind of beer) for him so that he could pass. The jaguar and the wolf killed the grey squirrel and the gigantic woodpecker, but to this day the Huichols offer sacrifices to these hero gods and call the squirrel father.

Not only is the entire territory of the Huichols full of sacred places, but also the land through which the Hikuli-seekers travel. In addition to these holy places, the people erect a number of god-houses, next to the temples, and also in lonely places in the forests. The most important of all the sacred localities is Teakata, where resides the most ancient idol, the God of Fire, besides a number of other deities.

The intense religious feeling and the desire to retain the favour of the gods manifests itself in a number of symbolic objects, which serve as embodiments of prayers and expressions of adoration.

As may be expected from beings whose life moves in such a narrow horizon, the symbolic objects are mainly those of their daily life; though some, like the shields, are no longer in practical use. They comprise, first of all, the paraphernalia of the warrior of ancient times: his front shield, his back shield, and his arrows.

The last, on account of their prime importance, we will consider first.

There is no problem in ethnology so difficult to solve as the meaning of the arrow in its different applications. It has a personal significance, and a relation to the clans into which the tribe is divided; and obliging though the Huichols were to me, they shrank from exposing so personal a matter. I have, however, succeeded in lifting a little of the veil of mystery that overhangs the arrow.

It is generally conceded that the arrow must be viewed as a bird with the neck outstretched, and the mystic power of the bird, which soars high and sees everything, is also attributed to the arrow. As the heart of the bird is between the wings, so the vital part or heart of the arrow is thought to be in that portion to which invariably feathers are attached, the so-called winged part. On this are painted symbolic decorations, consisting generally of longitudinal lines to indicate the path of the arrow, and zigzag lines to suggest its speed and strength.

Even primitive man has some idea of evolution and the struggle of mankind towards perfection. Therefore, we find in the Huichol myths that originally the arrows of the gods were made of a kind of stiff, coarse grass resembling bamboo, but lacking its strength. These arrows were too fragile, and the gods could kill rabbits with them, but not deer. They smeared rabbit blood on their arrows, yet that kind of blood was not very effective, and the arrows remained weak and ugly. The gods succeeded by and by in killing a doe; and after smearing that kind of blood on the arrows, the latter at once became strong and powerful, so that the gods could now go to hunt deer.

The arrow is a synonym for power, especially that of the gods. Thus the rattlesnake, the scorpion, and even the meteors, are arrows of certain gods.

Aside from the arrows used in the chase, there is another and very important kind, which is used solely as sacrifice to gain favour from the gods. In appearance this ceremonial arrow is much like the bow-arrow; but, as a rule, the rear shaft is more extensively decorated. What these decorations mean in each case is still largely a mystery. But this much is certain: that in a sense they are symbolic of the god to whom the arrow is dedicated; his coat-of-arms, or monogram, so to speak. On some arrows these markings are rather complicated, the decorations being divided into several fields, each having its own meaning. One may express the face of the god, another his wristlet; a red one may stand for the

blood of the deer, a green one for Hikuli, etc. Plumes, which are invariably attached to the arrow to speed it on its flight to the god, are always selected from a bird belonging to the special god to whom the arrow is addressed; for instance, the principal god, Grandfather Fire, has the royal eagle and the macaw—the latter on account of its brilliant fiery plumage.

The most common way to sacrifice an arrow is to stick it upright in the ground. Thus arrows may be found in all sacred localities; in springs and lagoons, in deep crevices between rocks, on the mountains, on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, wherever some god may dwell whom the imaginative Huichol desires to implore or to appease. For the arrow stands for him personally, or for the tribe, praying its silent prayer. "It talks alone," says the devout Huichol, meaning that it does not need the aid of the shaman.

More than anything else the Huichol uses the arrow to express his prayers and his adoration, and it is inseparably connected with his life. When preparing for any event of importance, he makes an arrow, thereby asking protection or favour from the gods. When a child is to be born into the family, the father's first duty is to make an arrow, and he continues to make arrows every five years for each of his offspring, until the boys are old enough to make their own arrows, or until the girls marry, when the husband assumes this responsibility. When the Huichol wants to hunt deer, or till the soil, or build a house, or marry, he has to make an arrow to insure success. In case of sickness, arrows have to be made to restore the patient to health; and when he dies, an arrow is stuck in the house, that the dead may not come back to disturb the survivors. Thus, from the cradle to the grave, in all conditions of life, arrows are made to smooth man's road as he journeys through life. Besides, in making arrows a man gains knowledge of all sacred things.

Not only are the arrows sacrificed by themselves, but they are also used as carriers of special prayers. The Huichol ties to them small front shields, back shields or mats, diminutive tobacco-gourds, sandals, bows, and many other objects expressive of certain desires. The idea is, no doubt, that the prayer is thus shot to that god whose address is painted in the coloured designs on the rear shaft.

The Huichols of to-day do not use front shields, but the shields are spoken of in their legends and myths. They use ceremonial shields as emblems of prayers for protection against evil and re-

quests for favours. Most of them seem to be dedicated to the sun, who, to the Huichol, is a man, whose shield is visible every time he climbs above the horizon. These ceremonial shields are made from split bamboo reeds, interwoven with variously-coloured crewel, so as to form a flat disk. Sometimes the traditional hole is left in the centre, but often it is only indicated in the weaving. The smallest shields may be only three inches in diameter; but there are also many which measure from twenty to twenty-five inches. What they lack in substantiality they generally make up in artistic merit, and the effect produced is frequently astonishing, considering the material at the command of the maker. Mythological, cosmic, and other ideas, all expressive of prayers, are woven into the shield and form the design.

It was a contemplation of these shields, hung up in a row, which caused my friend Mr. Cushing to suggest that the symbolism depicted on them makes it highly probable that these shields are related to the dance shields of the ancient Mayas. He thought that if these shields were hung up in the temples in some orderly array they would soon come to be considered as "speaking-shields," or an attempt to record events or deeds in visible form, and the next step would be to carve them on the walls as they are seen to-day.

Very different from the front shields are the back shields, which are also considered as mats or beds. Some of them are made of the same materials as the front shields; are rectangular in shape and present designs almost as beautiful. In conformity with the original idea of the back shield, as a protector against the fierce rays of the sun and the arrows of the enemy, the back shields have become very important media for prayers asking protection against evil. It is not uncommon to see depicted on them a mountain lion, which expresses a prayer that the god may protect the cattle against this ferocious animal. The Cora Indians complained to me that the Huichol tried to keep the clouds from reaching the Cora country by placing small back shields with designs of ferocious beasts in the roads, in order to frighten the clouds back and prevent them from leaving the Huichol territory.

There are also several other shapes in which back shields are made. Sometimes they are square and made by tying together splints of bamboo. Very often they are simply scraps of textiles woven for the purpose. In some cases back shields are made of grass. The grass is supposed to be the bed of one goddess, and the flowers that of another; therefore, these mats are prayers for rain, as neither

grass nor flowers grow during the dry season, but need the rain to blossom forth. But the idea connected with all the back shields is that the gods and goddesses are sleeping on them; hence the prayers embodied in the designs are in this way thought to be brought more efficaciously to the notice of the deities, who must see them when they are going to bed. Many prayers, for instance those for luck in handiwork, are expressed by back shields.

Another symbolic object of very great interest is the god's eye, called Sikuli, the idea being that it may rest on the suppliant and give him health and life. It consists, roughly speaking, in a diamond-shaped figure produced by interweaving the arms of a small cross with variously-coloured crewel. The *eye* is supposed to represent the flower of the squash; and at the feast of green corn and squashes these objects are attached to the heads of the children to insure their health. *God's eyes* are found in great profusion in the ancient burial-places in Peru, and in some cases they have been fastened to the false heads of mummies, serving actually as their eyes. This is a striking illustration of the wide distribution of some of the native ideas, as the same symbolic object is used by a multitude of tribes along the Pacific coast. It also demonstrates how the study of one American tribe may shed light upon the problems presented by another, though the latter be far removed from the former in time and space.

Finally, I will mention that votive bowls are also largely used as sacrifices and prayers. They are the ordinary drinking bowls of the Huichols, but much adorned with beads, which are fastened by means of beeswax, and form symbolic designs expressive of the desires of the giver. The idea which actuates this sacrifice is that the gods, when coming to use their bowls, will drink in the prayers of the people.

With the primitive implements and crude methods of the Huichols it is but natural that the products of this devotional industry should not be of a lasting nature. This is one reason why the ceremonial objects lose their power after five years and have to be renewed. Outside of each god-house are heaps of discarded ceremonial objects, from which an ethnologist may add to his collections. The people are kept busy making these curious objects, especially before each feast, when all the officers of the temple may be seen sitting around engaged in their manufacture. To the uninitiated it looks more like a toy factory than the solemn and prayerful preparation for a great ceremony of a pious and devout people.

In extreme cases, when rain is badly needed, the Huichols will deposit what we may call an *ark*, in imitation of the boat in which the first Huichol rescued himself, when (according to their tradition) a flood drowned everything living on earth. This *ark* is deposited in a lake a week's journey south of the Huichol country, the idea being that what was once associated with water may again bring about the same effect.

Still more ingenious is the manner in which they try to attract the clouds by exchanging water between East and West. They carry a quantity of water from a sacred spring located two hundred miles east in the Hikuli country, and throw it into the Pacific Ocean, replenishing the spring by an equal quantity of water from the sea. In that way they think they make clouds pass over their country, because the water would feel strange in its new surroundings, and would want to return to the place it was taken from. As it has no other way of travelling than by rising in the shape of clouds, the two clouds have to pass over the Huichol country, where they meet and, bursting against each other, fall down as rain.

A constant diversity of meaning is naturally attached to the Huichol symbols. Thus, a pair of sandals of ancient pattern which are worn only by the shamans at their greatest feast have, in diminutive size, become a synonym for a prayer that the feast may come off; also a prayer that no harm may happen to the shaman at the feast. And, inasmuch as the feast cannot be celebrated unless a deer has been killed, a pair of such sandals also expresses a prayer for luck in killing deer. Finally, as in olden times only the men wore sandals, they may further express a woman's prayer to get a husband. But, despite the diversity of meanings attached to most symbolic objects, we can always trace a connection between the object and the symbolic meaning expressed by it.

In a few words I will now touch upon the conventionalism of the designs and patterns with which they decorate their clothing and household utensils.

It is erroneous to suppose that an Indian simply sits down and draws from his imagination when working out his often beautiful designs. No. Everything in primitive art has a meaning. The designs utilized are generally reproductions of animals, flowers, and household implements. But in time they have become so conventionalized that in most cases, owing to the innate artistic sense of the people, they can no longer be recognized by any one unfamiliar with them. Even the Indians themselves do not always know their

meaning, and I got my best information from intelligent old women. Often I was not a little surprised at the ingenuity manifested in their technique. The designs are, so to speak, permanent talking prayers for protection against evil, requests for some benefit, or expressions of adoration.

The people sometimes adorn themselves with the corolla of a certain little white flower, called *toto*, fastening it to their cheeks with saliva. As this flower grows only during the wet season, it is symbolic of rain and corn. It is extensively used as a *motif* in their weaving and embroidering.

From the symbolism of the Huichols it must be inferred that the main consideration of all their prayers is food—corn, beans, and squashes. The means of procuring good crops is rain; therefore, the majority of all their prayers ask first for rain, and then for food, health, life, and luck.

The most striking feature of the world, as the Huichol looks upon it, is the prevalence of serpents. In all ages, and in most of the primitive religions, serpents have been of primary importance. In India the earth was called "the Serpent Queen"; in Greece, a serpent biting its tail was the symbol of eternity; in the northern and several other mythologies, the sea surrounding the world was thought to be a serpent encircling it. The serpent, by shedding its skin, rejuvenates itself, and thus becomes the symbol of health and strength. As it is the only animal that moves on the ground without legs, it is considered particularly cunning. Its great skill is further manifested in the beautiful markings on its back; and when the Huichol woman wants to weave or embroider anything, she passes her hand over the back of a live serpent held up by her husband, that she may thereby gain ability to do beautiful work. As in olden times the serpents were considered good guardians of treasures, so to-day the Indians leave their fields to be guarded by serpents. The Huichols believe that most of their gods and all their goddesses are serpents, and even the pools of water and the springs in which the deities live. In the sky, in the wind sweeping through the grass, the moving sea, the sinuously-flowing rivers, the darting lightning, the descending rain, in fire, smoke, clouds—in fact, in all natural phenomena—these Indians see serpents. Maize, the plant itself as well as the ears of corn, the bow with its elastic reaction, the piercing arrow, and even the tobacco-gourds—all are considered as serpents. It may be added that they see snakes even in their own flowing hair, in the girdles around their waists, in the ribbons

streaming from their heads and pouches, in their wristlets and anklets.

The sacrifices, symbolic and otherwise, that I have tried to describe may not seem very valuable from one point of view ; often they are mere trifles. But it should be remembered that the Indians are poor indeed, and have not much to give away, and that the making of the things implies a considerable expenditure of time and labour. The Mexican Indian never gives nor expects anything for nothing ; therefore, he has to pay the gods for everything he asks from them ; and he gives according to his means, knowing that "only a knave gives more than he has." To us his efforts are of intense interest, as they reveal the first faltering steps of the human mind towards expressing thoughts in visible form when first dawned the possibilities of that art which has become the most fundamental and the most powerful—the art of writing.

Advancing civilization has as yet scarcely touched the Huichol country. Once a year a priest visits one or the other of their villages for a week or two, to baptize or to marry those who desire it ; and he meets with no opposition as long as he does not interfere with the native religion. This is the case not only with the Huichols, but with all the Indians. They gladly accept Christianity, because, in their opinion, the more religion they have the better for them, as they are so much surer of getting what they always pray for—rain. But never will they give up their ancient beliefs as long as they have their land. When their country is taken away from them, when they become homeless and the servants of the white man, they lose their self-respect, become demoralized and indolent, and form the poor class of Mexico, as may be seen in the suburbs of the City of Mexico, where the once proud Aztecs are now the proletarians of the place.